Books can still be banned today if they are judged as tending to deprave or corrupt. And yet certain psychiatric experts believe that such literature in fact often neutralises the interests of potential sexual offenders. Censorship of literature in the past is full of such paradoxes. JONATHAN GRAHAM sees the history of banned books as a not always obvious reflection of the morality of the societies that have banned them—past and present.

## BYTHE BOOKS WE BAN...

court this week is the private prosecution brought by Sir Cyril Black MP against the book Last Exit to Brooklyn by Hubert Selby Jr. The charge: have produced works which, according to your obscenity. While it is not possible to argue the viewpoint, are either splendid items of erotica or merits of this particular case, it highlights yet again out-and-out filth. Eugene Field, author of the the problems, confusions, and ambiguities that surround the subject of allegedly obscene or pornographic books. What is pornography? What is likely to "deprave and corrupt"? Would anything? Further: where does literary licence end and offensive dirt begin?

As a subject, sex has been written about joyfully, informatively, mockingly, descriptively, and ecstatically—since man invented the written word. The oldest literature on record—that of the Sumerians of Mesopotamia in about 3000 BCcontains erotic songs. But there is writing and writing. As I see it, the distinction must be drawn between erotica: sexual writings which have some literary (often comic) or sociological value—or both —and pornography: which has none of these virtues, or intents, but is dedicated to the stimulation of sexual response. (And which, incidentally, only came on the scene because of censorship.)

True there are borderline cases, but the weakest fact that a book's sexual happenings are described in four-letter words. Such words have been used in literature since their invention—and have never been reserved for the pornographer. You will find them in Chaucer and Robert Burns, and Shakespeare was quite capable of making a broad joke employing a four-letter word (see Twelfth Night, Act Two, Scene 5). Nor need one stop there. The writings of Martin Luther, for example, are full of

Down for hearing at Marlborough Street police anal references at which even the most moderate modern cleric would baulk.

> Equally, some of the most respected writers sentimental poem, Wynken, Blynken and Nod, wrote an erotic classic, Only A Boy. Mark Twain's 1601, set in the court of Queen Elizabeth, is far removed from Huckleberry Finn, being an account of a fictional conversation started off by a loud burst of anal flatulence. Comic? Obscene? Or, as some critics would have it, a brilliant evocation of Elizabethan speech, manners, and morals? Twain was also the author of a work on masturbation: Some Thoughts on the Science of Onanism.

Benjamin Franklin, Swinburne, and Voltaire are others on a long list, as are Gilbert and Sullivan. Dear, tender souls who get gently and genteelly hysterical over Patience and The Mikado might well get hysterics of a different sort were they to hear a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's The Sod's Opera. All of which demonstrates that the writing of such material (albeit secretly) has never been exclusive to the illiterate scribbler.

But the chastening thought for censors, expurpornography came into being only with the introduction of censorship. When sex in literature was forced underground by the Puritans, out-and-out obscenity crept in under the counter. The literary erotica of the Elizabethans—ribald and outrageous though it might have been—was replaced by

Censorship first came to England in 1556. But it was introduced by Queen Mary, not because the

coming of the printing press had introduced erotica to a wide public, but because of the supposed dangers of Protestantism. Elizabeth I strengthened the laws, but again the only publications affected were "certain seditious and heretical books, rimes

Real trouble came with Cromwell, although in an indirect manner. In 1642 the theatre was abolished. To quote David Loth's excellent The Erotic in Literature (Secker & Warburg, 1962): "Then came bans on dancing and cards and all light literature—pornography was proscribed simply as part of light literature." (For my part I would prefer, in this context, "erotica" to "pornography.") Loth goes on: "Games on Sunday, flirtation, adornment of the person by jewellery or cosmetics or lovely clothes followed fast. The very prostitutes—for Puritanism did not seek to abolish sex, only the joy of it—dressed sombrely. . . . Immediately thereafter a new type of salacious literature appeared, aimed solely at the sexual arousing or tickling of the reader. Laughter and beauty and joy departed from pornography."

Observing the rule that action and reaction are equal and opposite, the reign of Charles II resulted in Restoration writers—particularly Wycherley, Otway, and Dryden—using language that was deliberately designed to shock and outrage, and was a far cry from the fresh simplicity of the Elizabethans. But censorship was still concerned more with religion and politics than sex. And it is of no little significance than when the Restoration excesses came to an end it was due to public taste people grew bored with it all.

Among the 18th century's publications were books that were immediate successes then but

MEMOIRS OFA WOMAN PLEASURE. LONDON: Printed for G. FENTON in the Strand

A Tudor Fireside Conversation As Written by the Ingenuous, Virtuous and learned Mark Twain, wit. Embellished by the worthy Alan Odle At London, Printed for Subscribers Only and are to be sold at ye beare Back-Side in Maiden Lane MCMXXXVI.



which were to outrage a later generation: Fielding's Tom Jones, Smollett's Roderick Random, and Sterne's Tristram Shandy. Plus, of course, the bestselling item of erotica of all time, which is still stigmatised as pornography: Cleland's Fanny Hill.

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And so Victoria—and all the sanctimonious hypocrisy of that era. In an age when Thomas Bowdler could emasculate Shakespeare, when Lord Chief Tustice Campbell "was shocked to think there should be so much circulation "for works like Dumas" Lady of the Camellias, it was inevitable that Parliament should pass its first-ever law on obscenity.

This law, of 1853, banned the import of "indecent or obscene "publications, and a further Act in 1857 banned the selling of such books. The 1857 Act was designed not to interfere with fine literature, but the Lord Chancellor, Lord Brougham, protesting over the absence of any definition of obscenity, complained: "I can easily conceive that two men will come to entirely different conclusions as to its meaning." A complaint which is still voiced today.

The result of these measures brought back the under-the-counter pornography of the Puritan age —but in a much more violent and vicious form. was, says Norman St John-Stevas in Obscenity and the Law: "the great period for pornography of every kind." In Loth's words: "With every tightening of the legal screw and with every refinement of Victorian modesty, the pornographic business took a fresh leap forward." This was the boom period for such pornographic classics of repetitive improbability as The New Ladies' Tickler, The Lascivious Hypocrite, The Adventures of Lady Lovesport, The Strange Cult, and others—all distinguished by nothing more than their sheer semiliterate nastiness. At the same time Zola's English

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publisher was jailed for presenting an expurgated version of La Terre, and libraries would not handle Hardy's Jude the Obscure or Moore's Esther Waters.

As more liberal thinking followed the moral indignation of the Victorians, it was reflected in more intelligent attitudes towards erotic literature —and the attraction of pornography's excesses waned. Yet it was not until 1959 that Parliament amended the 1857 Act and made it clear that an obscene work is one which, taken as a whole, "tends to deprave or corrupt." Hitherto it could be argued that part only could be obscene. Even so, this does not take us much beyond square one, since it can only be a matter of opinion, depending upon the individual's standard of values.

It is certainly true, however, that despite the setback of Fanny Hill, the law has been interpreted in a more broadminded manner since the Lady Chatterley case of 1960. Books are being written and published today, with only isolated cries of protest, which no publisher would have risked five years ago.

Oddly, the books which have recently become respectable after years of being smuggled in from Paris wrapped in socks at the bottom of tourists' suitcases, now read as pretty tame stuff. Putting aside the question of literary merit, I find it hard to believe that not long ago it was thought that people would be depraved and corrupted by Henry Miller, Casanova, Frank Harris, Restif de la Bretonne, and the Kama Sutra—or even that they represented true pornography.

The immediate question is: what happens now? Where do we go from here? David Loth's view is that obscenity laws only serve to incite the evils they pretend to correct by driving pornography underground. Filthy stories are given an attraction

they could not earn on their merits. His solution: to end censorship. "Authors, editors, critics, and above all readers are the best judges of the values and perils of print. In the long run their judgement

Which is perhaps a reasonable enough argument when you consider that it was the public's boredom which ended the market in pornography in an earlier age. But between the ending of censorship and the moment of rejection by a satiated public, would we all be corrupted and depraved by a flood of hard-core pornography?

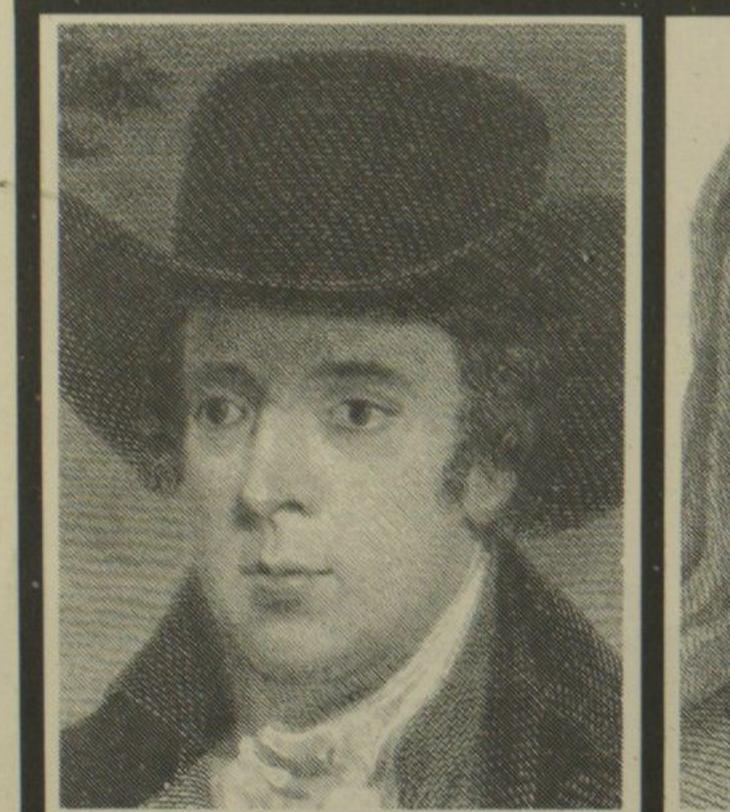
Says the writer and psycho-analyst, Dr Robert Lindner: "I am convinced that were all so-called objectionable books and like material to disappear from the face of the earth tomorrow this would in no way affect the statistics of crime, delinquency, amoral and anti-social behaviour, or personal illness and distress."

In their book, Pornography and the Law, published in America, psycho-analysts Drs Eberhard and Phyllis Kronhausen write: "It is our view that instead of . . . hard-core pornography causing sex murders and other criminal acts, it is far more likely that these "unholy" instruments may be more often than not a safety valve for the sexual deviate and potential sex offenders.'

Finally, Dr Benjamin Karpman, chief psychotherapist at St Elizabeth Hospital, Washington: "Contrary to popular misconception, people who read salacious literature are less likely to become sexual offenders than those who do not, for the reason that such reading often neutralises what aberrant sexual interests they may have."

In an ideal society, of course, pornography would not only be unnecessary, but meaningless.

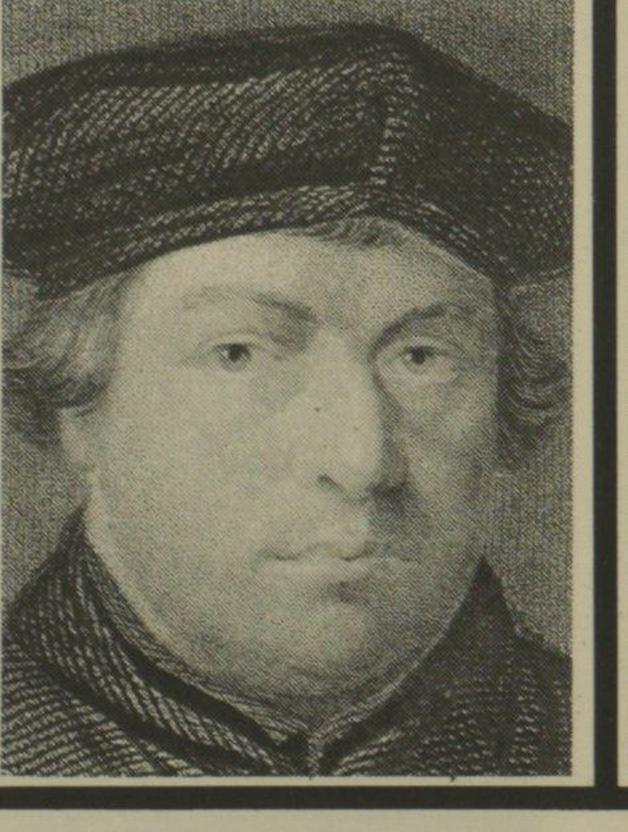
Four-letter words have been used by some of the most respected of our writers.



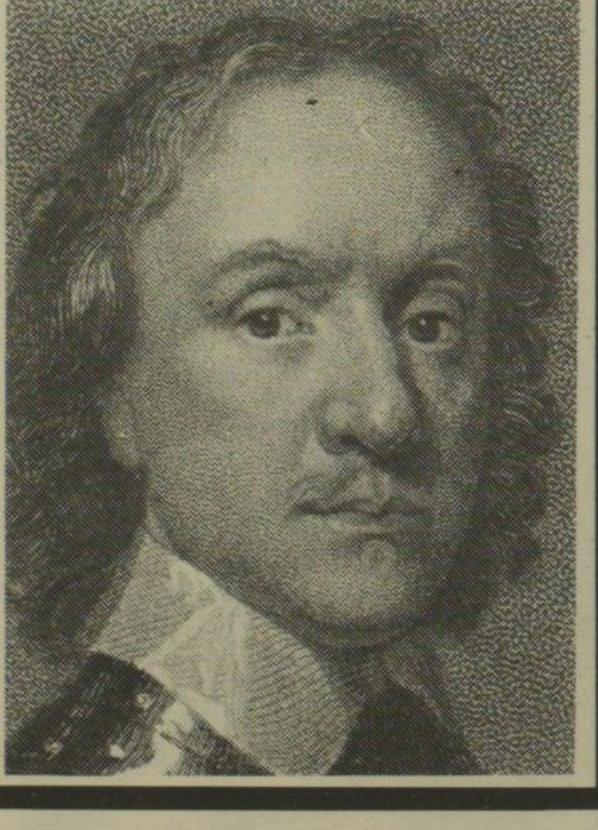
Some of Robert Burns's songs would shock.



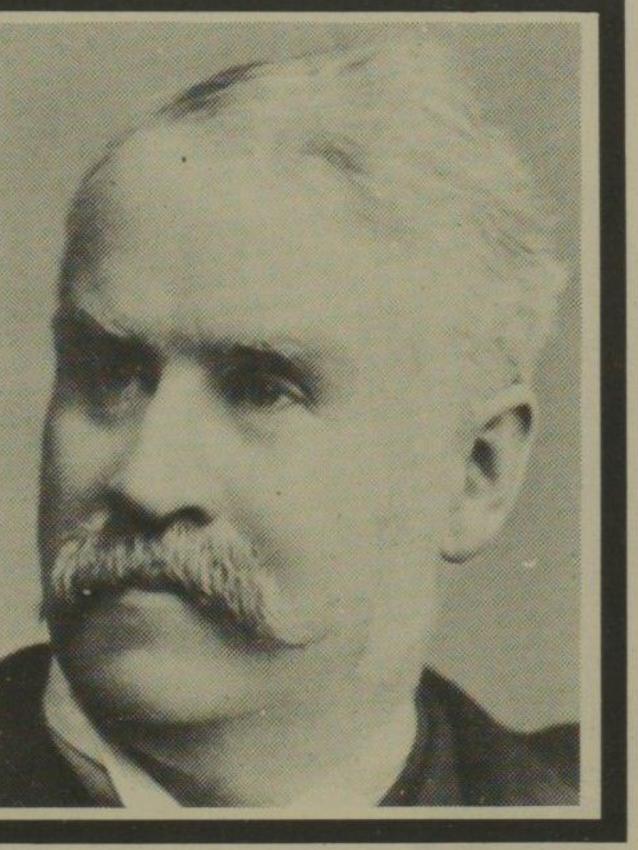
Chaucer's tales are spiced with ribaldry.



Luther's anal refer-Cromwell's censorship worked in reverse. ences occur frequently.

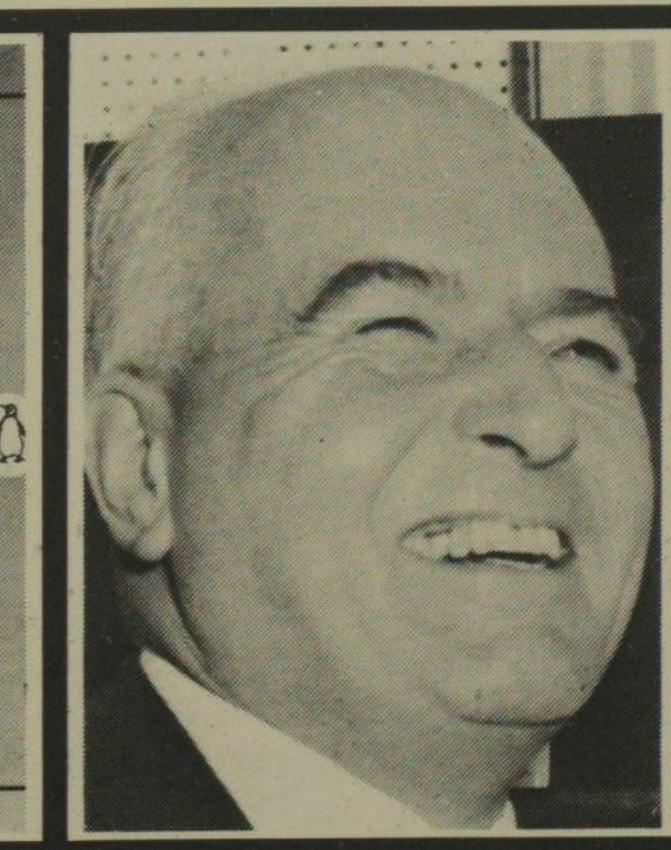


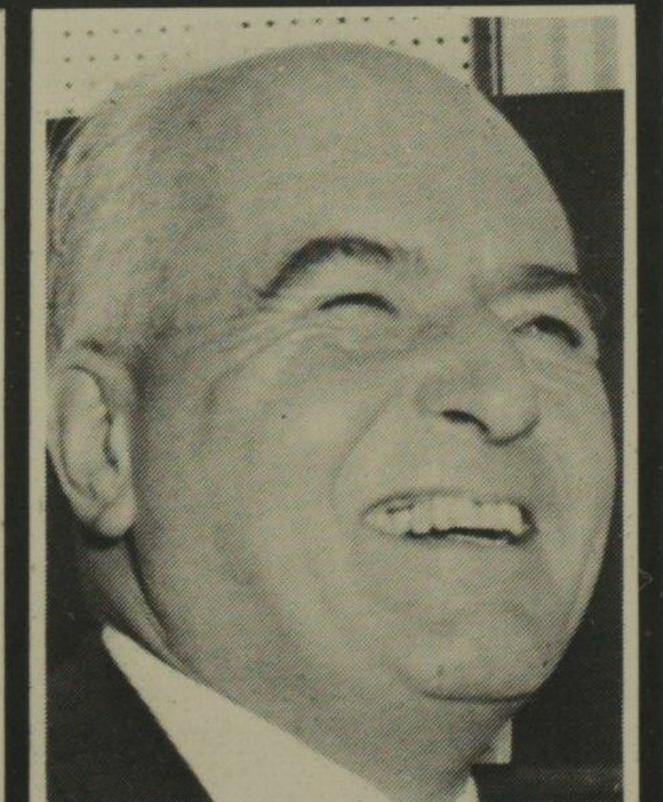
Mark Twain's 1601 is a classic of bawdy.

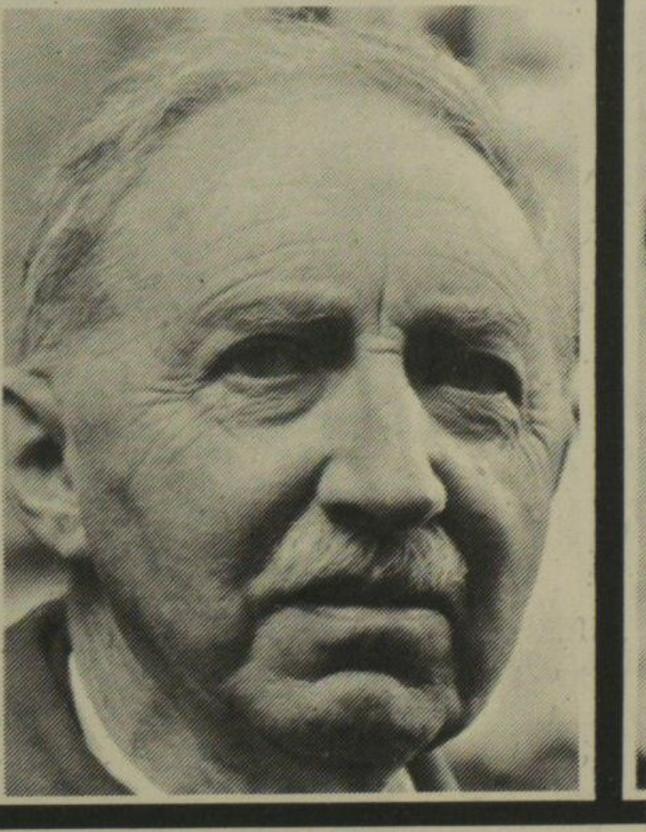


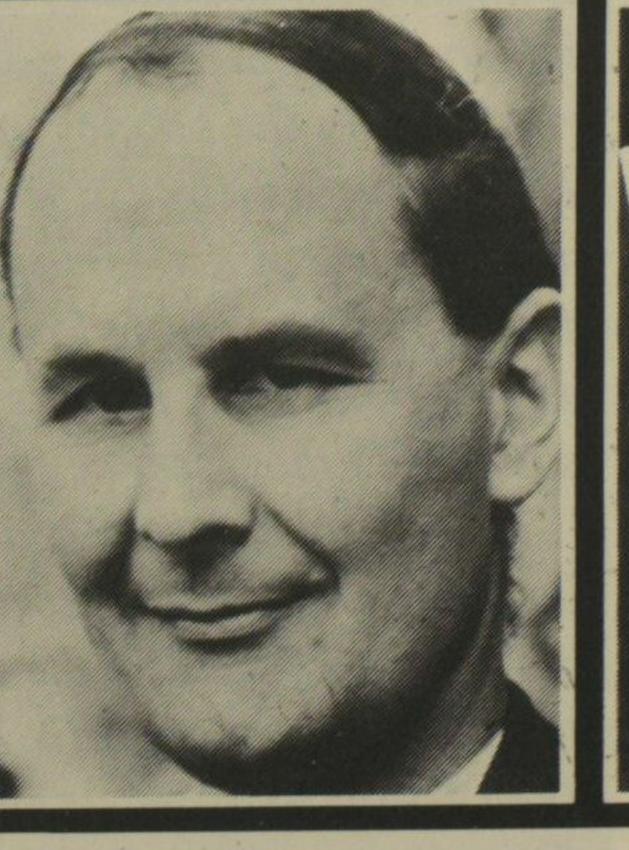
Gilbert wrote the words of The Sod's Opera.

The Lady Chatterley case brought the whole subject into the eye of the public.

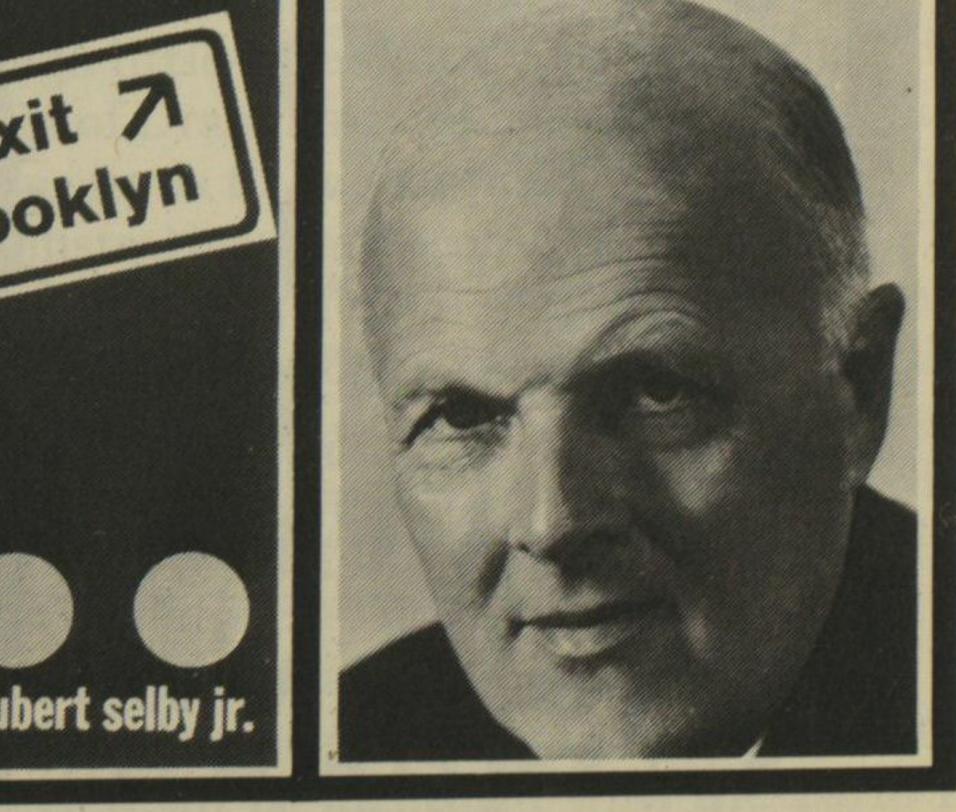












In 1961, Penguin Books were prosecuted for putting on sale an unexpurgated edition of D. H. Lawrence's novel. The defendant, Sir Allen Lane, was supported by E. M. Forster and the Bishop of Woolwich.

Sir Cyril Black, MP, is bringing a private prosecution against this book on a charge of obscenity.